



All in a Day's Work at the City of South Haven
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Day in the Park with Ella
May 22, 2008

My most recent assignment in the "*All in a Day's Work*" series took me on a two-day adventure with Ella in the Parks Department. Ella has been working for the city for 13 years. Her motivation and excitement demonstrated to me that she loves her job.

On this particular day in May, I met Ella at Stanley Johnston Park to plant flowers in the front circle. I am sure you have noticed the design of red, white and blue flowers facing Dyckman Ave. Making up these colors are Begonias, Salvia, and Hostas. This section has been designed for many years by the Parks crew. In fact, photos from the early 1900s also show a design here. Over a few days time, Ella and crew planted 80 flats of flowers in this area. The back part does not have a sprinkler system so the crew must water with the tank truck. This section is planted in red Celosia and green/red Coleus.



After we finished up at Stanley Johnston, we headed for the Optimist Tot Lot. Ella pointed out that sand recently replaced mulch as "padding" for the kids. We planted flowers in the box along the front. Then, we headed for the Police Station where we cleaned up a flower bed and planted flowers. Of course, these areas are maintained

by the crews throughout the summer.

Flowers in the islands on Quaker Street and Williams Street are planted by the Parks crew as well. The remainder of the downtown islands are planted and maintained by Dawn Grove. I am sure you have seen her with her hands in the dirt.

While Ella and I worked, she answered my questions and filled me in on details of how the department operated. There are a total of seven parks department employees. What are their duties? They maintain and clean public restrooms (painted annually); pick up litter and haul trash from containers; rake and blow leaves and remove dead flowers; shovel sand at beach access stairs every spring and as needed throughout the season; assist in putting up the ice rink; occasionally help fill pot holes; and water the flower islands and other areas. Some have sprinkler systems but several do not: Williams St.; Stanley Johnston Park (back circle); Optimist Tot Lot; Eagle St; Van Buren Overlook; and the new trees on Baseline. Ella said it takes 6 hours a day, 4 days a week to water, depending on the weather. Last year, a dry spell kept the crew continually watering.



I knew Ella and the Parks Dept staff had duties other than planting flowers so I planned to meet her another day.

June 6, 2008

I met Ella once again at Stanley Johnston Park, only this time it was to clean the restrooms which included clean toilets and sinks, take out the trash, sweep and mop floors, and wipe up the excess water from the floors. I didn't realize it, but she must wait for the floors to completely dry before leaving. This prevents slips and falls from users.

Ella begins her day at 7 am. First on her list is to visit all the parks to unlock restrooms and get the trash from the containers. Her route begins at Dyckman Park, then on to Elkenburg, Kids Corner, Packard, Stanley Johnston, Optimist Tot Lot. It takes about 1 ½ hours to make this first round. Then, Ella returns and cleans all of the restrooms at those locations.

Let's talk trash. When there is a festival, the crew begins at 6:30 a.m. to pick up litter and empty trash containers in the Central Business District. Working overtime, they return at 6:00 p.m. to repeat these duties. During that time, trash is picked up at both beaches. Here's a bit of trivia: Did you know that there are a total of 83 trash containers in the city? Another fact: \$5,292 was spent on trash liners over the months of June, July and August. The liners are made from petroleum and therefore the costs have nearly doubled. During an average week, 9 cases of trash liners are used; 15 cases are used during a festival weekend.



The duties continue. There are 40 mowing spots the crew must mow at least weekly. On a regular basis, Monday and Friday, the crew sweeps and picks up trash downtown. At the beginning of the season, the pavilions are power washed and signs and pavilions painted.

The Parks Department also lends a hand in cleaning up the cemetery for Memorial Day.

Some jobs may sound trivial to you and I, but really are important. For instance, crews put out the signs for the Farmer's Market twice a week and even remove landscaping stones

from the pond at the city hall fountain. It's a mystery how they get there.

I learned quite a bit working with Ella. Lots of activities are taking place behind the scenes – things I see every day but don't stop to think who is doing it or how it is being done. Like me, I hope this article gives you a certain appreciation for the work the Parks Department does.

Visit the city's web site to view past articles: www.south-haven.com If you have suggestions for topics, you are welcome to email me at: ddavidson@south-haven.com

Until the next adventure,

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